



TODAY'S CHIROPRACTIC

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By Jean McAulay

Chiropractic IN THE Military

Colorful World War II General George S. Patton once said, "Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory." During the same era, British

Prime Minister Winston Churchill remarked, "I never worry about action, but only inaction." Is it possible their advice applies just as well today to the campaign to advance chiropractic in the U.S. military? Do chiropractors need to take up the challenge, mount a strategic offensive and maneuver their profession into a more advantageous position?



Retired Brigadier General Becky Halstead comforts an injured soldier.

Way back in 1944, a bill was introduced to commission chiropractors as officers in the military, yet today the profession is still absent from the armed forces. Efforts to provide chiropractic care to active duty military personnel and veterans have been underway for more than a decade and are meeting with greater success, although progress is still slow.

Trying to pinpoint the exact reasons for the struggle to incorporate chiropractic into the military is a bit like trying to crack an enemy code. But, according to most people involved in the fight, the front is advancing.

TAKING IT SLOWLY, VERY SLOWLY

"Nothing changes quickly in the military," observes retired Brigadier General and chiropractic advocate Becky Halstead, who today does pro bono public speaking on behalf of the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress. "I don't know what's held progress up but I really think it's more of an economic thing than a philosophical thing."

Still, Halstead was shocked when she first learned there have been laws on the books for years mandating the commissioning of chiropractors as officers and for providing care to active duty personnel and veterans. "When I realized Congress passed a public law in 2000 saying permanent chiropractic care is a benefit for all active duty medical personnel, but that today we have fewer than a quarter of the military treatment facilities that have a chiropractor on staff, that just blew my mind."

Halstead made the difficult decision to retire from the army after 27 years of service at the age of 49 and at the height of her career due to pain associated with chronic fibromyalgia. Despite seeking medical care, pursuing physical therapy and taking handfuls of prescription medication daily, she no longer felt able to serve as an active commander with the demands of wartime leadership.

Pursuing chiropractic care on her own, today Halstead requires no prescription medications

and is successfully managing her condition—while running her own leadership consulting company and promoting chiropractic in the military.

FOLLOWING THE LEGISLATION

Halstead is the first to admit it's difficult to follow the twisting path of federal regulation related to chiropractic and the military. "There's no one depository of information," she says, so sometimes conflicting data is reported about the number of military facilities offering chiropractic for active duty personnel, how pervasive services are in the Veterans Administration facilities, and the status of current bills.

The military history of chiropractic starts in earnest in 1985 when the Department of Defense was directed to determine the feasibility and cost effectiveness of chiropractic through the Chiropractic Health Care Demonstration Program. The project concluded in September 1999, showing chiropractic would

be beneficial to troops and to the military. It was replaced by the Chiropractic Care Program in 2001 which was to extend care to all active-duty personnel by 2003.

Progress was slow, however, and in 2004 the Secretary of Defense was directed to speed up implementation so all service men and women would be able to access chiropractic care by October of 2005.

Unfortunately, according to the military's health benefits provider, Tricare, today only about 60 of the 261 currently operating Military Treatment Facilities (MTF) offer chiropractic

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services. Other organizations and sources often quote slightly different figures but all point to just a small handful of MTFs currently providing chiropractic care.

On another front, in 1992 President George H.W. Bush signed into law the Defense Authorization Bill H.R. 5006 that authorizes the Secretary of Defense to "appoint chiropractors as commissioned officers in the armed forces to provide chiropractic care within the military health system."

According to John Falardeau, vice president



for government relations for the American Chiropractors Association (ACA), in the last session of Congress there was also a non-binding resolution in the House and Senate urging the Pentagon to begin that process. It didn't pass. "All branches of the services currently have the ability to commission DCs but they haven't done so," Falardeau explains.

He also says last year's National Defense Authorization Act had language calling for a series of clinical trials of DCs in combat operations and for embedding chiropractors in special forces units to gauge the efficiency and effectiveness of chiropractic care in combat settings. But there are still no chiropractors with troops in Afghanistan or Iraq today.

Halstead personally sees almost no chance of chiropractors gaining commissions as officers, strictly due to competing demands for limited positions. "If you want to create a new skill set in the Army it has to replace something else because there isn't going to be growth. They'll try to civilianize as many positions as possible so an open slot can be used for another fighter."

THINGS GETS TRICKIER

Efforts by the chiropractic profession to advance its position within the U.S. military are further complicated by varied schools of thought within the profession. Some chiropractors feel comfortable following the current lead of the military to incorporate chiropractic essentially as a subspecialty of medicine and to require a

referral from a primary care provider to control patient access. Many feel this enables a "foot in the door" that can later be pushed open wider as chiropractors become more commonplace in the military and patient demand rises.

Others believe it's better to insist chiropractic be offered as a separate and distinct profession to which military members can self-refer for wellness care and performance enhancement, rather than strictly musculoskeletal conditions.

Terry Rondberg, D.C., president of the World Chiropractic Alliance, is firmly in this camp. "Personally, I'd rather not be included than to be in the way we are now," he says. "It's hardly the vision of B.J. Palmer to be included as third-rate medical practitioners," he says.

Rondberg served as a member of the Department of Defense Chiropractic Advisory Committee assembled in 2005 with members from the profession and the military charged with how to incorporate chiropractic. He advocated for creation of a Chiropractic Corps modeled after the Dental Corps so chiropractors could provide chiropractic examinations and adjustments to correct vertebral subluxations with direct patient access.

"Many other DCs on the committee wanted to fit into the medical system and to serve as primary care providers where medical doctors weren't available," Rondberg argues. "That was the beginning of the end as far as I'm concerned. We had more DCs on the committee than they had military personnel and we still lost the vote for direct access."

Others argue chiropractic access is improving. "We're in 52 bases across the country and will soon have DCs in army bases in Germany and also a naval base in Okinawa," says the ACA's Falardeau.

The ACA also issued a news release in May 2010 touting the U.S. House of Representatives passage of H.R. 1017, the "Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act," saying it puts, "America's veterans one step closer to gaining access to chiropractic care at all major Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers."

H.R. 1017 requires the VA to have Doctors of Chiropractic on staff at no fewer than 75 major VA medical centers before the end of 2011 and for all major VA medical centers to have a Doc-

tor of Chiropractic on staff before the end of 2013. There are nearly 160 VA treatment facilities nationwide and currently the VA provides chiropractic care at 32 facilities, according to the ACA release. A companion bill (S1204) has been introduced in the U.S. Senate.

"Unfortunately though, the benefit is only available to active duty people," explains Falardeau. "We have a bill in Congress right now to expand services to dependents and retirees. It's still in the House Armed Services Committee." The legislation is H.R. 484, the "Chiropractic Health Parity for Military Beneficiaries Act" and would require the Secretary of Defense to develop and implement a plan to provide chiropractic health care services and benefits for certain new beneficiaries.

MARCHING FORWARD

"Anecdotally, there has been a limited acceptance in the Department of Defense, and greater acceptance in the VA," explains Falardeau. "Chiropractors should be contacting their members of Congress and urging them to co-sponsor H.R. 484."

Halstead concurs. "I really believe chiropractic care can exponentially improve readiness for the entire military because it would improve each individual's wellness," she says. But she admonishes the profession to do more to make it happen.

"We're always going to have a military, so strategically the chiropractic profession should never give up trying to integrate into it. But I'm a patient and I do more in terms of donating money and speaking on behalf of the profession than 80 percent of the docs out there," Halstead argues. "I'd never ask my soldiers to do something I wouldn't do myself, but I'm practically begging DCs to get interested in their own profession. I just wish the profession would see this as a strategic opportunity to demonstrate that chiropractic care is probably, in the long run, one of the most valuable forms of health care available to our military."

"Many DCs are doing things for individual warriors coming home and I applaud them for that," Halstead adds. "But at the end of the day, decision-makers want to see the research and data to back up chiropractic. If the chiropractic community really wants to show the military that they can be a combat multiplier to military readiness, they need to figure out how to provide data that show it."

Perhaps the profession should take that as an order.



Becky Halstead (far right) poses in full fatigues.